

# The Theater Arts Students' Contribution to Develop the Community's Character

**Fantasi Fana Sari Asmara<sup>1</sup>, Suyanto<sup>2</sup>, Sunarmi<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Art Education, Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta

<sup>1</sup>fantasi.asmara@yahoo.com, <sup>2</sup>suyantoska@gmail.com, <sup>3</sup>narmied@yahoo.co.id<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:** from a sociological perspective, in creating performing arts, artists start from the conditions they face, both the conditions of society or their conditions. Compared to other arts, theater art manages to present reality in a more complex way because the object of theater art is human. Therefore, the values created by an artist or creator's performance cannot be separated from the reality of society. Based on this basis, theater arts students can act as artists or creators of performance art, by creating creative works that are expected to be able to reconstruct and spread social values, so that Indonesian people have better character.

**Keywords:** *theater art, social value, character*

## Introduction

Art can influence and convey an understanding of values as it can create the same new realities or even beyond everyday realities. In art, new realities are conveyed through the presented metaphors and signs. Metaphors are a sign interaction model, in which the sign of a system is to explain the meaning of other systems, in other words borrowing forms, writing, and verbal to produce new meanings (Sugiharto, 1996: 102). Metaphors present impressions and images that can be used for any purpose. Thus, art can be brought into any interest, such as politics, religion, social, economy, and culture. For socialist artists, art can be utilized to represent social inequalities. Through art, the audience is expected to be aware of the reality in daily lives and do something regarding the repression they faced.

Wolff revealed that the development of arts is inseparable from its community. As a social product, art has conditioned and produced historical aspects (Wolff, 1981: 1). Wolff's thought of bringing together sociology and art is a relatively suitable approach to be applied in this study. It can be used as a reference that in creating performance art, theater artists always start from the conditions they face, whether personal or community condition. Hence, values inherent in a performance created by artists or creators can never be separated from the reality of society. They process the values in such a way to be presented to the community to build the community's awareness of the current conditions. Through performance script, artists or creators try to educate or make the community aware of the inherent values. During the process, they indirectly become aware or learn from the work they created too.

Regardless of class, status, degree, or others, one can create a work (theater performance art) that can educate others (audience). Based on this perspective, students from any institution, particularly theater art students can also act to create such work as they have obtained knowledge about it. Besides getting knowledge from the institution, they also gain supportive knowledge from the organization outside the institution. As a creator, art students have a big opportunity to convey existing values that have lost or even new values to the public. In this case, they have to possess a high sensitivity to the condition of the community.

Indirectly, students may be referred to as agents of change. They brought changes in various fields, such as economics, culture, and politics. History records that major changes in Indonesia were initiated by students. Student awareness in the organization field was marked by the

establishment of Budi Utomo on May 20, 1908. Further, the Youth Pledge concerning equality in a nation on October 28, 1928, was one of the evidence that students have brought changes. Besides addition, the proclamation declared by Sukarno was the evidence of students' power in politics. In the governmental system, the government reform in 1998 to bring down President Suharto was also initiated by the students. Moreover, there are some other changes initiated by students that give major contributions to the current condition in Indonesia. Then another question arises, what was the contribution of theater arts students in this case?

Therefore, the role of students is needed in developing Indonesia's future, which is currently experiencing several events leads to disintegration and decline of the national moral ethics in society, even some national elites lost his personality as religious, civilized, and a dignified nation in Indonesia (Supratno, 2017: 157). Art students can make a significant contribution to supporting and developing a civilized society through various creative works. In this context, students' creative work contains local wisdom and our nation's values such as cooperation, compassion, diversity, peace, etc. These values seem to have faded at this time. Performing arts have the power to reconstruct and spread these values. Through theater, they are now actions that can be seen, understood, and their implementation clearly illustrated (Segedin, 2017: 6).

## **Discussion**

### ***The Reality of Real Life and Performances***

Performance art is an event where a person or group of people called performers or presenters act in a certain way to be watched by other groups of people called spectators or audiences (Simatupang, 2013: xxxiii). The key requirement of performance art is a will. Then, the other requirements are people's willingness to convey something in unusual or extraordinary ways and other people's willingness to accept it. As it is conveyed extraordinarily, the reality of the performance may be different from the reality of real life.

The reality of the performance can present any reality, either a representation of daily life reality or even beyond daily life such as dreams, hopes, or ideals. The values of daily life that faded or lost in society can be brought back in performance art. In this case, performance can present the values of diversity or other values through its script. In other words, artists create a performance with values that have lost, for example, the value of tolerance as today's community seems to be more individualist.

Extraordinary performance requires a beginning and an ending. In performance, there is a reflection of humanity. The audiences will judge and compare the reality of daily life with the reality of the performance. Then, they will realize the imbalances or differences between the two realities and finally, they will make a reflection. In the reflection, they can criticize themselves, others, the community or even the world as the creators or insert all related values in the performance or the script. This reflection becomes the strength of performance values. Through this reflection, the audiences are provided with alternative solutions to address the issues faced by the community. Therefore, they can act following the applicable values in the community.

Theater art is capable to encourage the audiences to learn values that should be developed in society, such as diversity, cooperation, and togetherness, as performance arts can construct any value. Consequently, performance art becomes an essential part of constructing a value required by the community. The development of theater, by its very nature, is repeated when continuous practice forms a work (Lea, Belliveau, Wager, & Beck, 2011: 12). For example, annual theater performances held by theater arts students on March 27-29, besides providing a forum for

students to develop and show their talents, provided a space to socialize with the public who enjoyed the performance. Even, most of the presented stories were derived from daily life issues so that it was easily accepted by the audience (the public). The spectator is asked to coexist and co-act in a theatrical fact, that isn't any more a fictive creation but more slice of real-life (Gemtou, 2014: 12).

Sometimes the existing values in the reality of everyday life are forgotten by the community. Values that should have been maintained and preserved increasingly fade due to various influences, both from inside and outside of the community. For example, the value of togetherness in a gathering or celebration event started to fade or lose. It was because there were changing habits in the community and their overcrowding activities.

Before enjoying a performance, the audience has always prepared themselves by providing a space in their imagination. Space was formed as they realize the imbalance of reality between their daily and the performances. They tried to incorporate the values inherent in the reality of the performance of an extraordinary event through existing space and time. The inserted values in the performance had a big influence on the audience (Yudiaryani, 2002: 32). When the integrated value was noble values, then it would likely form a noble civilization as well. On the other hand, if the integrated value was bad, it would form a bad civilization. In this case, inserting noble values into performance art was beneficial for building a better civilization in this country. Consequently, it would be very useless if a performance art did not incorporate noble values as it has a big opportunity to improve the community in this country.

### ***Values Inherent in Performance Art That Develop the Students' Character***

As elaborated earlier, a performance can present values that start to fade or even missed in the community to the audience. As creators of works of art (theater performances), students have a task to convey the missing or new values beyond the reality of performance art. They were expected to be able to create and present creative values in a performance art which does not only educates the audience but also the creators (Sumardjo, 2000: 89). Before creating such works of art, they have to understand the value that will be conveyed to the audience. Thus, they have to learn the values well. After learning the values, they will have an awareness of the benefits and importance of these values to be inserted in the performance art. Through the established characters, the students and the community were expected to be able to address various issues in the country.

As creators of the performance, the students inserted the values into their work and consequently, it has impacts on themselves. Indirectly, the values built the students' self-awareness. These values would be accumulated in the students' consciousness to act following accordance with the values inherent in their works. Further, they would disseminate (spread) the values through their creative work. Students can create new values to build Indonesian culture to prevent ethnic, tribe, and religious wars.

In other contexts, they can create cross-cultural works, for example, a Javanese script performed by non-Javanese actors in various regions outside of Java. Even so, this performance was appreciated and the audience received it well. Collaborative performances between departments within an art institution are an example of cross-cultural performances. The multicultural spirit promoted by students is a spirit to celebrate diversity. They used performance art (theater) as media of a celebration. Performance art is also media to bridge diversity in a cross-cultural context.

As the creator of values in performance, students were expected to have a noble character under the values they created. The noble value was expected to be useful for building students' character as it will affect the character of the community. In a wider context, the character of the nation will also be established by itself after the students and community characters were also established.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the above elaboration of the theater arts students' contribution to the community, it can be seen how performance can build the character of the community and the students themselves. Art does not only talk about aesthetic issues, but it deals with how it provides learning value for the community. Thus, the students' contribution, particularly students of the art can address varied issues in the country. Through extraordinary performances, art students were expected to uphold the existing values or even create new values. The values covered togetherness, peace, cooperation, and love in a society that were also beneficial for building students' character. The role of art students in the community and nation is as a creator of values in performance art (performance scripts).

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